

Tomorrow (Sunday, June 14) the 10:45 a.m. worship service of Bryan's First Presbyterian Church will feature a short stage presentation from the Biblical story of Gideon. Adapted for worship from chapters 6,7, and 8 of the Bible's Book of Judges by First Presbyterian member, Scott Reynolds (recently turning 90 years of age), this is not the first on-stage production of Gideon.

In 1961, playwright Paddy Chayefsky adapted Gideon for an acclaimed Broadway production. In 1971, Robert Hartung adapted Gideon for an NBC Hallmark Hall of Fame television feature.

From the biblical narrative, Chayefsky, Hartung, Reynolds, and other writers and preachers have focused on developing an appreciation among the audience for Gideon's insecure resistance to God's call for faithfulness in the face of stressful opposition. This evokes smiles and chuckles. Many who hear the story of Gideon may remember other Biblical characters who exhibit insecure resistance to God's call, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jonah.

Occupationally a small-scale farmer, herder, and wine-maker, Gideon tests God's authenticity with a series of clever and even comedic trials, but the deeper socio-political and military aspects of the story are truly serious. According to the Biblical account, God is recruiting Gideon to lead a resistance and liberation movement against the Midianite raiders to the east who have been creating economic and community-life havoc for the harassed Gideon and his neighbors. As a socio-political resistance movement with military aspects, the story of Gideon includes combat and loss of life (not necessarily part of every "Gideon" stage script).

It is easy to enjoy Chayefsky's, Hartung's, and Reynolds' adaptations and to leave Gideon as a humorous caricature of our own insecure resistance to God's efforts to enlist us as individuals for God's service beyond our own "caves, fields, and winepresses." Undoubtedly

each person's reluctance to be engaged by God beyond our own "comfort zones" and routines is substantial.

Peeling back the "layers" of an ancient narrative – between ironic humor and violence from conflict – whether portrayed or left to one's imagination, we discover sobering realities of repression and resistance in other periods and places of history. The role played by Gideon with his Hebrew-Palestinian neighbors is not much different from: Native North and South Americans facing dominating Euro-Americans from the 1500s through the 1800s; those of African origins facing slavery deportations to the Western hemispheres; European Jews facing persecution and pogroms across the centuries; Palestinians facing a post-World War II Jewish influx; native Africans facing the Apartheid policies imposed by those of European ancestry; etc.

With this understanding, Gideon is much more than a caricature of my reluctance to be the person God seeks for me to be in God's service. Gideon is also a character like George Washington, Dred Scott, Frederick Douglass, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King, Jr., Yasser Arafat, Golda Meier, Yitzhak Rabin, Anwar Sadat, Nelson Mandela, etc.

The Bible reflects the real world. Real conflict has sociological, geographic, religious, gender, economic, and ethnic roots and branches. Yet the Bible also tells stories which indicate how God's holiness comes to life among vulnerable and flawed human beings in ways which challenge our complacency, our fears, our prejudices, our stereotypes of ourselves and others.

God coaxes Gideon to trust and to courage several times in several ways. Not one of us is Gideon. All of us in some ways are like Gideon. May God meet us with engagement for being advocates and colleagues whenever we are reluctant and whenever we observe oppression or repression, where any person is deprived of the dignity and measure-of-worth God always is giving.